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Human Rights and Scientific and Technological Developments

Report of the Secretary-General

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1. In its resolution 1984/27 of 12 March 1984, the Commission on Human Rights requested the Secretary-General to submit an updated report to the Commission at its forty-second session, from 3 February to 14 March 1986, taking into account further comments provided by States, relevant international organizations and other sources. An earlier report had been submitted in 1984 under Commission on Human Rights resolution 1983/41 (E/CN.4/1984/33 and Add.1 and 2).
2. Consequently, a note verbale by the Secretary-General and a letter by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights were sent to those Member States, specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that had not responded to the previous requests addressed to them.
3. As at 15 November 1985, replies had been received from the Governments of Burundi and the Federal Republic of Germany. Replies had also been received from the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; International Labour Office; World Bank; International Fund for Agricultural Development; Organization of American States; Bahá'í International Community; Commission to Study the Organization of Peace; Friends World Committee for Consultation; International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; Inter-Parliamentary Union and Medical Women's International Association.

4. The summary of replies received will be found in sections I-V of the report. 1/

1/ The full text of all replies received is available for consultation in the files of the United Nations Secretariat.

I. Replies from Member States of the United Nations

Burundi

[Original: French]

[1 August 1984]

The Government of Burundi believes that scientific and technological developments should serve to improve the living conditions of peoples and nations. Through modern technology, the effective and adequate dissemination of information on human rights and the participation of the people as a whole in political, economic, cultural and social life are possible and in the interest of mankind.

Scientific and technological developments can also make it possible to improve administrative, legal, legislative and other institutions which are designed to promote human rights and medical services for all population sectors, to eliminate illiteracy and to promote education at all levels without segregation of any kind.

The technologically advanced countries must make every effort to bridge the widening gap between the economically developed and developing countries.

An attitude of caution should, however, be maintained towards scientific developments, which may jeopardize individual rights and freedoms. In the opinion of our Government, scientific and technological developments should not be utilized to accelerate the arms race, to repress peoples and their liberation movements or, in general, to create social problems.

Germany, Federal Republic of

[Original: English]

[29 January 1985]

Over the past and in the present scientific and technological developments have greatly contributed to the realization of human rights - political and civil rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. It has at the same time, however, become ever more important to counter possible detrimental effects of scientific and technological developments.

At the national level the Federal Republic of Germany seeks to protect the individual human being with all available means against the harmful effects of scientific and technological developments. This holds, for example, for the protection of privacy, the protection of the individual against misuse of personal data, or the protection of the individual against misapplication of the most recent scientific and technological achievements in the areas of biology, medicine and biochemistry.

At the international level as well, the Federal Government does whatever is in its power to contribute to the prevention of harmful effects of scientific and technological developments. Within the framework of the United Nations this can be illustrated by the initiatives of the Federal Republic in the Economic Commission for Europe (in the area of environmental protection) and at the Conference on Disarmament (in the areas of arms control and disarmament).

In view of its already overloaded agenda the Commission on Human Rights, in dealing with the agenda item "Human Rights and Scientific and Technological Developments", should avoid duplicating the work done in other United Nations bodies. The Commission should instead concentrate on those areas in which it can make a contribution of its own for the promotion of human rights by way of, and the protection of human rights against science and technology. Positive steps in this direction have been taken by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, for example, in the work being done in the field of data protection.

II. Replies from organs of the United Nations system

World Food Programme

[Original: English]

[11 July 1984]

World Food Programme stated that it had no comment to offer or any information to provide on the subject.

III. Replies from Specialized agencies

International Labour Office

[Original: French]

[8 August 1984]

All necessary indications on recent ILO activities in this area are to be found in the book entitled "Facing the technological challenge" (ILO, Geneva, 1985). ^{2/}

The ILO draws particular attention to the reports prepared for the first session (Geneva, 15-19 April 1985) of the Advisory Committee on Technology (report I: Technologies which are appropriate for meeting social objectives of developing countries; report II: The socio-economic impact of new technologies; report III: Blending of new technologies with traditional activities) and for the Meeting of Experts on the Implications of New Technologies for Work Organization and Occupational Safety and Health in Industrialized Countries (Geneva, 25-29 March 1985). The conclusions and recommendations of these two meetings are summarized in the above-mentioned book.

^{2/} A copy of this publication is available for consultation in the files of the United Nations Secretariat at Geneva.

International Fund for Agricultural Development

[Original: English]

[8 November 1984]

IFAD's activities are directed exclusively towards assisting the most disadvantaged groups in many members developing countries, namely, the small farmers, the landless workers, the small artisans, the poor fishermen and the like who constitute the Fund's target group.

IFAD has recognized that only the increase in food production in developing countries can provide a fundamental and permanent solution to the food and nutrition problems of developing countries.

IFAD has also recognized the need to support agronomic and socio-economic research to provide new technological bases for increasing the productivity of agricultural resources. Accordingly, the Fund's Lending Policies and Criteria have emphasized the need to focus on research that leads to new production parameters in favour of the small farmers and the landless in the developing world.

The experience gained so far from IFAD's operation indicates clearly that the productivity of small farmers can be increased substantially if they are provided with adequate means of production and other services including appropriate technology and the results of relevant scientific research. With increasing food production, the disadvantaged acquire the power to assert their human rights to food and to a relatively more decent standard of living. IFAD has been able to organize the rural poor into functional groups, provide them with the necessary technical package and input supply mechanisms and marketing research support. Putting to use the technological and scientific results of research for the benefit of the disadvantaged would contribute not only to peace and security but also to the establishment of a new international economic order. It is our hope that IFAD's efforts and activities will not only satisfy the immediate need of this group of people and reduce their dependencies, but will also hasten as well the attainment of self-sufficiency in food through the application of the principle of self-reliant development. The only permanent solution to the problem of hunger and malnutrition lies in teaching farmers how to explore and employ their full potential to satisfy their basic needs.

In many instances, increasing food production for the target group through, inter alia, the provision of appropriate technology, requires structural reforms covering the political, economic and social aspects prevailing in a certain area in addition to investment in selected fields. This is essential if we want to reap the maximum benefit from investment projects and modern technology and research. The small farmers and the landless must be freed from discrimination and deprivation if we want them to realise their full potential. The structural-reform process is slow and thorny and requires the concerted efforts of all concerned. Through its projects, IFAD has been able to assist participating Governments to change, modify or adjust policies and institutions in order to ensure that the benefits flowing from the project are largely received by the poor. For example, in some cases it has been stipulated that new improved land in irrigation and land reclamation projects will be made available to the small farmers or landless agricultural labourers. In others, traditional cost-sharing arrangements between landlords and tenants regarding payment for inputs or facilities being provided through the project would be revised so as to benefit the poor.

In order to assist the rural poor to assert their rights and hold the reins of their own destiny, IFAD places great emphasis on the involvement and effective participation of the rural poor which is fundamental to the evolution and success of poor-oriented agricultural and rural development. The rural poor should determine for themselves the most appropriate use of the means of production put at their disposal including technology and the result of relevant research. Effective participation implies active involvement in decision-making regarding project identification, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and, above all, benefit-sharing. In IFAD, people's participation is viewed as an essential instrument of development and, hence, as an important criterion for assessing the impact and benefits of a development project or programme. It goes without saying that women constitute a large segment of the poor and underprivileged group in most rural societies. As such, IFAD seeks in the projects which it finances to provide support for the involvement of women in development. One central element of the Fund's efforts is to make the poor self-reliant in order that they can carry on and improve upon the project-initiated activities by themselves, once external aid comes to an end.

The World Bank

[Original: English]

[10 July 1984]

The World Bank stated that all technical and financial assistance from the World Bank to its member countries was provided with the sole purpose of improving the economic well-being of peoples in those countries.

IV. Replies from the regional commissions

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

[Original: English]

[22 January 1985]

ESCAP attaches the utmost importance to the fulfilment of the United Nations mandate on human rights and has sought to contribute towards such fulfilment through its multisectoral development efforts. With specific reference to "Human Rights and science and technology", ESCAP is firmly committed to the notion that the judicious application of science and technology is a key not only to socio-economic development but to the promotion of human rights and realization of the fundamental freedoms of all people, particularly with reference to the rights to development as defined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and other pertinent instruments. This position on the part of ESCAP has been made explicit in the adoption of the ESCAP Plan of Action on Technology for Development (E/ESCAP/399) by the Commission at its fortieth session held in April 1984. To serve as a guideline for comprehensive national, subregional and regional follow-up activities, the Plan of Action embodies the region's determination to bring about, through the application of technology, a socio-economic transformation encompassing, inter alia, industrial modernization,

infrastructural reform in both economic and socio-cultural terms, the upgrading of the quality of human resources and, most importantly, the eradication of mass poverty. In a region such as ESCAP, where abuse and violation of human rights occur often because of dire economic conditions, lack of socio-economic opportunities and the resources with which to take advantage of such opportunities where they exist, and other social ills associated with underdevelopment, utilization of technology to combat such conditions of underdevelopment must be regarded as a potent strategy with direct bearing on the cause of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

V. Replies from intergovernmental organizations

Organization of American States

[Original: English]

[22 January 1985]

The OAS stated that OAS Human Rights Commission had not prepared any studies on the subject in question: the most effective ways and means of using the results of scientific and technological developments for the promotion and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

VI. Replies from non-governmental organizations

Bahá'i International Community

[Original: English]

[30 January 1985]

In order for science and technology to play its potentially significant role in the full realization of human rights, its results must be used to advance the material and spiritual well-being of humanity and it must be motivated, supported and inspired by spiritual values and a universal recognition of the organic oneness of mankind.

The results of scientific progress should be used to promote the full material and spiritual development of mankind. In the Bahá'i view, the fundamental goal of science must be the improvement of the material, economic, moral and spiritual life of mankind. Thus, scientific efforts must be consecrated to such ends as the extermination of disease, the raising of the standard of physical health and the eradication of poverty. In particular, the results of scientific progress should be used to facilitate the unification of all the peoples of the world. In this respect, scientific progress must be used to promote such advances as the enhancement of world inter-communication, the evolution of auxiliary world language and the organization, full development and equitable distribution of the economic resources of the world.

Science will be used to promote human rights only when it has a spiritual foundation. Science cannot improve the spiritual life of mankind unless it is motivated by spiritual values and supported by a recognition of the fundamental oneness of mankind. At the primary level of the individual, the instilling in individual scientists of an awareness of the organic unity of humanity and of the necessity to direct scientific progress towards the improvement of human life can be a most effective way of enhancing the contribution of science to fundamental human rights and freedoms. Likewise, at the level of society as a whole, the

development of a world united politically, socially and economically, yet encouraging the diversity of thought, habits and cultures that so enriches the whole of humanity, will encourage and foster scientific efforts in all countries aimed at the promotion of human rights.

If scientific progress is to be used to advance human rights, it must be on the basis of the religious values brought by the founders of the world's revealed religions. Religion and science, "the most potent forces in human life," must be brought into unity. It is the Bahá'í conviction that only when scientific progress is balanced with spiritual advancement will scientific and technological developments be devoted fully and exclusively to promoting the human rights and ensuring the economic, social, cultural and spiritual well-being of the entire human race.

Commission to Study the Organization of Peace

[Original: English]

[27 July 1984]

The Commission to Study the Organization of Peace informed the Secretary-General that it had been for a long time concerned about the subject of "Human rights and scientific and technological development". The position taken by the Commission toward this problem could be found in its 1967 report. ^{3/}

Recent developments in biochemistry have brought the matter again to public attention, and in this connection the Commission hopes that the United Nations will carefully consider how human rights should be protected against technological encroachments.

Friends World Committee for Consultation

[Original: English]

[27 July 1984]

The Friends World Committee for Consultation stated that it would have some concern about this subject and that it would like to reserve the right to make some response at a later stage.

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

[Original: English]

[29 October 1985]

ICFTU stated that it shared the concerns expressed by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1984/27 and 1984/28 and that the 1984 World Economic Review of the ICFTU at the thirteenth ICFTU World Congress Statement on Peace, Security and Disarmament ^{4/} fully documents the ICFTU's views and activities on the subject of "Human rights and scientific and technological developments".

^{3/} A copy of this report ("The United Nations and Human Rights", Eighteenth report. Commission to Study the Organization of Peace. New York, August 1967) is available for consultation in the file of the United Nations Secretariat.

^{4/} Both documents are available for consultation in the files of the United Nations Secretariat.

Inter-Parliamentary Union

[Original: English]

[3 August 1984]

IPU stated that due to the fact that the question of "human rights and scientific and technological developments" had never been studied as such by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU was not in a position to express any views on the matter.

Medical Women's International Association

[Original: English]

[22 November 1984]

The right to health is a fundamental human right and MWIA basically stands for the right of all people to health.

Through policy-making decisions MWIA tries to evaluate advances of medical technology in terms of equal distribution to all people considering the fact that all people have human rights.